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**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
15 January 1965**

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Communist Views on an Indochina Conference

SUMMARY

The Asian Communist powers have periodically called for a reconvening of the Geneva Conference on Laos. However, there is no evidence that they are prepared or interested at present in making any significant concessions of their own in order to obtain a Laotian settlement. While Communist China and North Vietnam would probably attend such a conference on Laos, they have made it very clear that they are not presently disposed to undertake any serious negotiations on South Vietnam.

The Soviet Union appears to be increasingly concerned over the possibility of escalation of the fighting in both South Vietnam and Laos and is searching for some means of inhibiting the actions of both the US and North Vietnam. The Russians have mounted recent efforts to stimulate initiatives by other governments to arrange negotiations. They appear to be concentrating their diplomatic approaches on France and India. To date, they seem to believe that Laos provides the only possible opening for negotiations. It seems unlikely that Moscow has fully coordinated its tactics with either Hanoi or Peiping.

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Soviet Attitude Towards an Indochina Conference

1. The pattern of Soviet diplomatic and propaganda attention to the Indochina conflict over the past six weeks appears to reflect increased concern over the possibility of escalation of the fighting in both South Vietnam and Laos. The Soviets recognize that this prospect would confront the USSR with awkward and dangerous decisions. Their search for means of inhibiting the actions of both sides has strengthened their interest in an international conference, or some other form of negotiations.

2. The upsurge in Soviet activity coincided with Ambassador Taylor's consultations in Washington in late November and early December and with the movement of substantial numbers of North Vietnamese troops into southern Laos last month.

Viet Cong/North Vietnamese/Chinese deployments and intentions, it seems possible that Moscow believes they are preparing a major offensive in Laos and South Vietnam under the pretext of blocking alleged US schemes to extend the war "over the whole of Indochina."

3. Soviet uncertainty and concern regarding US intentions probably has been heightened not only by US air strikes against Viet Cong infiltration routes in the Ho Chi Minh trail area but by a more general feeling that the US may be impelled to take more far-reaching measures in an attempt to break the existing stalemate. One of Foreign Minister Gromyko's main purposes in his talks with Secretary Rusk last month was to probe for signs of US plans which might lead to escalation and also for indications of Washington's attitude toward negotiations. He raised the subjects of Laos and Vietnam in

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three conversations, stressing that continuation of the tense situation and apparent US plans with respect to North Vietnam would complicate the situation and create great danger. Gromyko sought to reassure the US of Moscow's desire to prevent any expansion of the fighting by emphasizing that the USSR had no interests in either Laos or South Vietnam other than "improving the situation." He complained that Secretary Rusk appeared to be against holding conferences on Vietnam and Laos and argued that if the US wanted to improve the situation, he did not see how it could object to conferences on these questions. Gromyko remarked that those who objected to conferences did not look very good.

4. Soviet efforts to forestall moves toward escalation by either side have followed the familiar pattern of combining warnings of possible Soviet intervention in an expanded conflict with attempts to stimulate initiatives by other governments to arrange negotiations. Moscow has continued to repeat its warning of 26 November cautioning the US against "provocations" against North Vietnam and stating that the USSR "cannot remain indifferent to the fate of a fraternal socialist country and is prepared to give it the necessary assistance."

5. The Soviets have concentrated their diplomatic approaches on France and India.

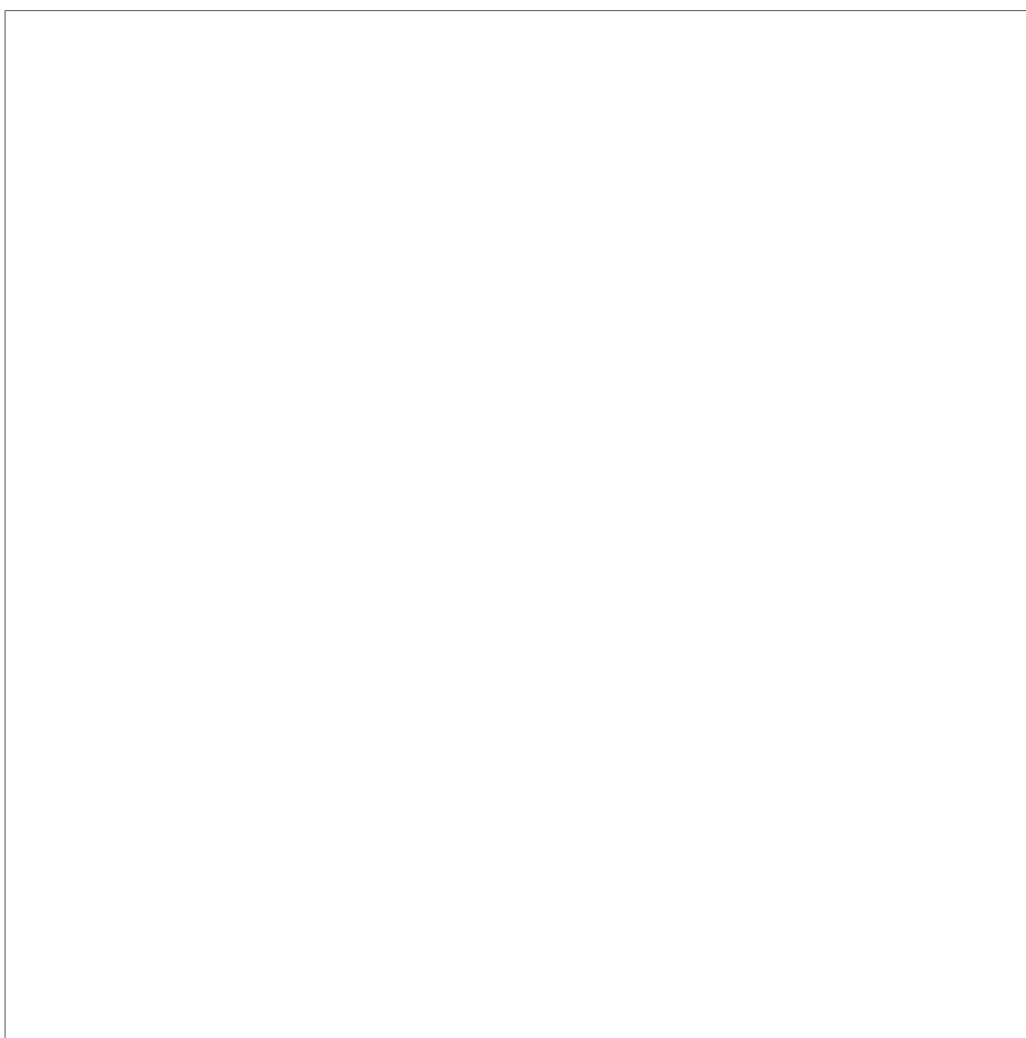
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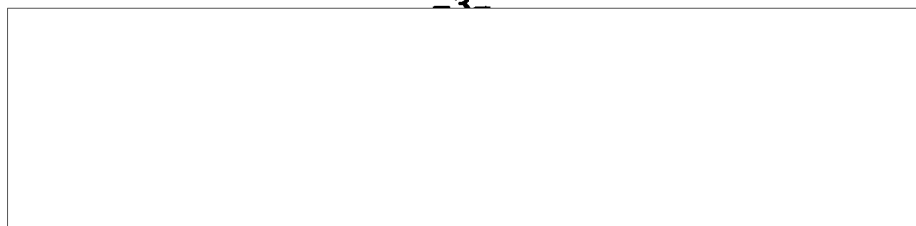


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7. The fact that Moscow is reduced to trying to prod France and India to take the lead in moving the Indochina conflict to the conference table underscores the USSR's inability to exert any significant influence on the policies of either side. Over the past two years, Khrushchev several times made clear his frustrations and desire to wash his hands of the whole question. He sought at least to give the impression last summer that the USSR was seriously considering withdrawing from any

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further responsibility as Geneva co-chairman. This attitude reflected his recognition that the USSR was operating at great disadvantage vis-a-vis China in this area and that the Soviet Union faced the prospect of continuing erosion of its position and assets in Indochina.

8. Khrushchev's successors find themselves caught between the same conflicting pressures of the competition with Peiping, which dictates public support for the North Vietnamese, and the desire to avert an expansion of the war which, they fear, would lead to the rapid spread of Chinese influence and destroy Hanoi's ability to maintain even a facade of neutrality in the Sino-Soviet struggle.

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9. Although the new Soviet leaders have adopted a line of more vigorous verbal support for North Vietnam and the Viet Cong and have dropped Khrushchev's threat of disengagement, they have been no more successful than he in finding a way to escape this dilemma. They continue to reject the extreme alternatives of attempting to out-bid Peiping by all-out support for Hanoi and the Viet Cong, with all the risks of a major confrontation this would carry, and strong diplomatic initiatives to move the conflict into negotiations, which would at least

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imply repudiation of the North Vietnamese and invite new Chinese charges of capitulation to the imperialists.

10. In this tight situation, the only option now open to Moscow remains the essentially negative one of playing for time while maneuvering to reduce risks of escalation. The tenuous truce with Peiping circumscribes the Soviet range of diplomatic maneuver. Over the longer term, however, it is possible that developments related to the Communist preparatory meeting in March will terminate the truce and increase Soviet freedom of action to press for a negotiated settlement. Kosygin may have a freer hand to take up this question when he visits London this spring. There are indications, meanwhile, that the Soviets and Poles are developing a scheme to force the reconvening of the 1962 conference on Laos next summer. In a talk with Ambassador Sullivan on 12 January, the Polish ICC commissioner in Laos noted that under the terms of the Geneva protocol, the co-chairmen must present a report, no later than 23 July 1965, to members of the conference on the question of terminating the ICC. He advocated early termination and said the co-chairmen report would provide a logical occasion for reconvening the conference.

11. Apart from such procedural maneuvers with respect to a Laos conference, the Russians probably will proceed very cautiously on the much more delicate issue of negotiations on Vietnam. In view of their desire to avoid open cleavages with Hanoi if at all possible, they probably will try to induce other governments to take the lead in extending negotiations to include a Vietnam settlement. The Russians, however, have taken one step to prepare their eventual bargaining position by agreeing to the establishment in Moscow of a permanent office of the National Front for the Liberation of

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South Vietnam. This move to enhance the authority and international status of the NFLSVN suggests that the Soviets will press the theme that a settlement should be worked out primarily by South Vietnamese parties and groups without "outside interference" by the great powers.

12. As for the international aspects of an Indochina settlement, the Russians probably will find no better alternative than to revive their earlier conception of the neutralization of Indochina. Soviet spokesmen [REDACTED] promoted the idea that Moscow regarded the Laos settlement of 1962 as the first step in a "package deal" which eventually would be extended to Vietnam. They urged close US-Soviet cooperation in working toward such a settlement. One of their "selling points" was that the US would find it easier to deal with a "Soviet-oriented" Ho Chi Minh than with Chinese-dominated elements in Hanoi which probably would take over later. The Soviets indicated that a Vietnam settlement, without barring eventual reunification, would establish two separate Vietnams living with each other in "peaceful coexistence."

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13. The Soviets probably recognize that the hour is very late for negotiating a settlement based on neutralization. But the prospects inherent in present trends in Indochina are so ominous from the Soviets' viewpoint that they apparently feel they have no choice but to "stay in the game" and work to tie the antagonists down in protracted negotiations.

Attitude of Communist China and North Vietnam

14. Both North Vietnam and Communist China have periodically called for a reconvention of the Geneva conference on Laos during the last two years. During the past few months, however, these calls have become less frequent, probably

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because Hanoi has been able with a minimum effort to successfully contain the Laotian military pressure on the ground, while the air strikes have not resulted in as much damage as the Communists evidently feared at first. Current pronouncements from China and North Vietnam, however, make it clear that they would attend a new Geneva session on Laos.

15. At such a meeting, both Peiping and Hanoi would seek to limit the discussion on Laos to the traditional elements of the Laotian question, calling for example, for a withdrawal of alleged US forces in Laos and a reconstitution of the tripartite government under circumstances which would guarantee its domination by the Pathet Lao. Their tactics would feature attempts to extract concessions in the pro-Western position on Laos; there is no evidence that they are prepared or interested at present in making any significant concessions of their own in order to obtain a Laotian settlement.

16. Should a Laos conference develop, the Asian Communists would doubtless attempt to line up pressures against the US on South Vietnam. Their current actions and statements, however, indicate that they do not believe the US has as yet been pressured into such a position that a satisfactory settlement on South Vietnam can be obtained, therefore, they are not interested in real negotiations at present.

17. Chinese Communist and North Vietnamese views on the war in South Vietnam would almost certainly not be moderated because of Russian initiatives with Peiping and Hanoi. There is no evidence, in fact, that current Soviet attempts to reconvene the Geneva conference have been coordinated with the two Asian Communist states. Neither country has recently gone beyond its routine propaganda support for such a conference with any private overtures designed to generate support for a new session.

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